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Clements (A)

TWO PHOTOGRAPHS.

An entirely New and Original Comedietta.

IN ONE ACT.

BY

ARTHUR CLEMENTS.

LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH,
PUBLISHER,
89, STRAND.

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SAMUEL FRENCH & SON
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38, EAST 14TH STREET.

First produced at the Strand Theatre, London, under the management of Mrs. Swanborough, February 23rd, 1884.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

Mr. Hodge	... ...	Mr. H. Proctor.
	of the Devonshire Boarding House.	
Mrs. Hodge	... ...	Miss Jane Grey.
Miss Pipkin	... ...	Miss Eleanor Bufton.
	of Bubblecome.	
Mr. Slater	... ...	Mr. Philip Ben Greet

Time, 35 minutes.

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Permission to play this Piece must be obtained from SAMUEL FRENCH, 89, Strand, London.

TWO PHOTOGRAPHS.

SCENE. *Coffee-room of the Devonshire Boarding House. Centre door with key in lock. Windows with long double curtains* R. *and* L. U. E. *Fireplace with mirror over* R. 1 E. *Door* L. 1 E. *Bell pulls either side of the mirror. Two tables at back with album and writing materials on. Table and two chairs* R. C. *Lady's chair* L. C. *Pictures on walls. On* R. *portrait of* MRS. HODGE. *On* L. *portrait of* MRS. HODGE'S *first husband. The room plainly, but comfortably, furnished.* HODGE *discovered with long feather-brush dusting pictures, furniture, &c.*

HODGE. I'm about tired of it, I am. I was a deal more comfortabler when I was a engine-driver. Now my life's one unendin' splutter. I goes on, and goes on for ever. I might as well be the Flying Dutchman, or the Scotch Mail. I'm not a man. I'm a engine, that's what I am.

(*bell rings violently* L. C.)

That's my wife a ringing for me. Let her ring. I've struck! Cos why? From the time I polishes the Devonshire plate, on the front door, in the morning, to the time I lets in the last tipsy Devonshire gent at night I'm at it, allus at it. Who transforms her Smithfield pork into Devonshire bacon? do! Who conwerts her Devonshire butter out of Shoreditch compound? I do! Who meets the Devonshire eggs by the French Packet? Me! Who fetches the Devonshire cider from the Lambeth Winegar Works? Me! me! me! Blow Devonshire I say, and particularly blow Bubblecome!

MRS. H. (*calls outside*, C.) Hodge!

HODGE. She's a calling now. (*looks at portrait on wall*) You're her late husband, *you* are. *I'm* her early and late husband, I am. You was a pretty beauty, you was, to go and die and leave such a woman as that behind yer. (*shakes fist at picture*)

MRS. HODGE *enters* C., *and stands listening.*

When you went and suicided yerself, when you went and took a happy release, and a Bubblecome jury made the company pay yer widder £500 because you was a Bubblecome man, it was me, sir, as the damages fell upon, not the company.

MRS. H. (L.C.) Go downstairs, Mr. Hodge, and be careful what you are saying.

HODGE. (R.C.) I shan't go down stairs, Mrs. 'Odge, and I'll say more. When the Bubblecome people as wisits London puts up with you, because you're a Bubblecome woman, I wish you had a Bubblecome husband to make up the party.

MRS. H. It's yer living isn't it, man?

HODGE. I don't live, I gasp-es, and when I ain't a gaspinf I'm a hidin' among the saucepans. Don't you keep *me* out *oe* sight, because I ain't a Devonshire man? While *you'r'* adoin' the grand upstairs, among the wisitors, *I'm* doing the *dirty* below. I might as well be a cockroach! Damn it, I'm not a man, I *am* a cockroach, Mrs. 'Odge. (*bell rings without*) There 'tis. (*goes to* R. *window*) Bubblecome! I knows it. Chatter about Devonhsire for you, and me to the tation for a load of boxes, as would break down a Helephant snd Castle! Why didn't you marry the Parcels Delivery at once? (*walks to and fro, then loudly so as to be heard below*) Blow Bubblecome! Damn Devonshire, I say.

MRS. H. Hush, William, would you ruin me?

HODGE. Yes; I would! Look here, Betsy, will yer give up Devonshire? Will you forget Bubblecome? Will yer go in for something else? Anything but this, from newspapers to greengrocery. (*pathetically*)

MRS. H. No! I've said it and I mean it. I owe everything to Bubblecome, and I'll live and die for Devonshire.

HODGE. Then I'll split upon you. I'll expose you to every Bubblecomite, one by one, until I drives you to despair, and founds a quiet life, and a honest living upon the ruins of yer Devonshire Boarding 'Ouse.

MRS. H. Go downstairs, William!

HODGE. I won't! I'm tired of going downstairs. Will yer give in?

MRS. H. Never!

HODGE. All right! (*sits* L. *of table*)

Enter MISS PIPKIN C. L. *with luggage and umbrella.* MRS. HODGE *advances to meet her.*

MRS. H. Miss Pipkin, I declare.

HODGE. (*rising and politely*) From Bubblecome, in course

MISS P. (C.) Your husband? I hope——

HODGE. (R., *taking packages and umbrella*) I have that honour, mum. I comes from Whitechapel myself. She throwed herself away on me, mum. And how did you leave all our friends at Bubblecome? (*takes packages, &c., up to back*)

MRS. H. (*distressed*) Excuse my husband, please, Miss Pipkin. Can he settle with your cabman?

MISS P. (*sitting* R.C.) He's settled with. Don't disturb yourself, Mr. Hodge, I beg.

HODGE. (*advancing* C.) I wasn't intending to, mum, no offence all the same. Mrs. 'Odge, the lady would like a cup of tea, with Devonshire cream. You know what I mean. Every lady from Bubblecome begins with a cup of tea and *Devonshire cream*, don't they, my dear? Do be quick, that's a good woman, or Miss Pipking will be telling the Bubblecome folks as we don't know our business. (*pushes* MRS. HODGE *up towards* C.) Go on, my dear, do be quick. I'll make it wuss if you stay. (*aside to her*)

MRS. H. You villain! (*Exit* C.)

HODGE. (*knowingly*) She didn't want to leave me. Do you know why, mum? (*earnestly*) You see me a miserable man! I'm a himpostor, so is my wife, mum—so is——

MISS P. (*rising*) Mr. Hodge!

HODGE. Mum!

MISS P. (R.) Will you hear me first? She'll be back in a minute—will you let me tell *you* something? I'm in London on the sly. I'm an impostor too. Oh, Mr. Hodge, I've a great difficulty on my mind, it makes me blush. I'm in a peculiar and most delicate situation.

HODGE. Upon my word, indeed, I will ring for my wife, mum, at once. (*crosses to bell pull* R.)

MISS P. (*seizing his arm*) You misunderstand me. Not for the world—you make me blush—if I could blush again after the step I've taken. I hope I blush, Mr. Hodge. But you mustn't speak to your wife about it. Oh, no! That would be worse than all. I know what women are. I'm a woman, Mr. Hodge. It is for that I appeal to a man, to you, to your secrecy, your consideration.

HODGE. (R., *aside*) I'd better have gone downstairs, I had.

MISS P. (L.) With Mrs. Hodge my secret would be known all over Bubblecome at once, with you I shall be safe. I have come to London on the sly. I blush to say it—I've come to meet a gentleman.

HODGE. Well, Miss Pipking, wotever young woman from the country comes for anything else? They're all upon the prowl.

MISS P. But, Mr. Hodge——

HODGE. (*confidentially*) Well, mum?

Miss P. I've come to get married! I must tell you the truth. I blush to say it—I've come to London to get married!

Hodge. In that case, mum, you're fortunater than the most on 'em. But so did Mrs. 'Odge, wuss luck to it. Well, mum, I don't see why *I* should be the only wictim. Show me the man, and I'll bring him to you by the collar. He don't kick, though; perhaps he means business after all, eh?

Miss P. I hope so. I blush to say it—I hope so. (*takes photograph in envelope from bosom*) Look at this. Do you think he seems like a deceiver?

Hodge. He seems werry young, mum. Excuse my saying it. He looks ten years younger than ought to satisfy you. Bless me, you must be nearly thirty, and this young fellow's hardly out of his teens. It ain't fair upon him; s'omever I've given my word. I hope he ain't larking! But *you* know best in course, you must have found him out by this time, a woman of your experience; you've watched his goings on, trust you for that.

Miss P. Mr. Hodge, that's the difficulty. I blush to make the admission, but I must tell you all. I've never met him yet.

Hodge. Never met a man, and got him fast, then how the ——I thought I was going to teach you something, but upon my word, I'm beat. We knows a dodge or two at the Devonshire Boarding 'Ouse, but go on, Miss Pipking, it ain't for me to tell them dodges to you.

Miss P. The truth is, you must have heard that a Mr. Slater, at Bubblecome, had ideas about me, but he said nothing, although I had waited for some years. Well, one day, seeing an advertisement in a newspaper—I blush to say it, I answered it—as a joke, you know. Well, the other gentleman—the advertiser, sent me his photograph, and wrote me so earnestly that I sent him mine. We corresponded in short—and after a while, a long while, and proper inquiries—of course, I made inquiries—we became engaged, and he is to meet me here at ten o'clock to-day, if you have no objection. What I want you to do is to manage it so that nobody else should know. I wouldn't have it go back to Bubblecome for worlds.

Hodge. If it's anything to spite Bubblecome, I'm with you, mum. (*runs to* C. D., *listens, returns*) I'll tell you all about the sham that this here Boardin' House is——

Miss P. Excuse me, Mr. Hodge. You see, if there should be any slip—if the young man didn't come, I should go back without a stain upon my character, and as there has been no

quarrel between Mr. Slater and myself, I—I—need I say more, Mr. Hodge ?

HODGE. You needn't, mum. You don't want to lose the chance of the Bubblecome gent till you've closed with t'other. Werry innercent indeed, mum. And the young man. Did you mention his name, mum ?

MISS P. He knows me as Flora, and, I blush to say it, I only know him as Frank. But that's enough, isn't it, Mr. Hodge ?

HODGE. I've no cause to grumble if you're satisfied, mum. Let's have another look at Frank so as to be on the safe side.

MISS P. (*gives him photograph*) Is it not a good honest face, so young, so bright, so hearty ? Mr. Slater is not bad ; but Mr. Slater is a lemon to this blushing peach. (*crosses to* R.)

HODGE. He is werry young, but I'll do my best with him (*aside*) He'll want it before he comes to the scratch, I'l. wager.

MISS P. You're very good, very generous, Mr. ——

MRS. HODGE *enters* C. *with tea service, which she places on table* R., *observing* HODGE *looking at photo.*

MRS. H. (R.) Your likeness ! Do let me see ! I'm sure it must be a good one. What a colour you have ! (*alluding to face*) It makes you look ten years younger. (*alluding to photograph*)

MISS P. (*aside*) Oh, if I can but look ten years younger to him !

HODGE. (L.) Yes, it is a good un ! The Devonshire hair is good for photographs. (*pockets it*)

MRS. H. (*forced laughing*) Do you approve of that, Miss Pipkin ? William, I'm ashamed of you. Give the lady her photograph, you're wanted downstairs.

MISS P. Do I approve of it ? Really, your bursting in like that quite confused me after the journey. Yes, I do, Mrs. Hodge ! Why not ? Keep it, Mr. Hodge, I can do without it, indeed. (*aside to him*) Don't leave me !

MRS. H. (*severely*) Miss Pipkin, do you know what you are saying ?

HODGE. Don't worry the young woman, Mrs. 'Odge. Take the tea away. I'm sure she don't want it now. (*winks*)

MISS P. Yes, Mrs. Hodge, please take it away. Do go.

MRS. H. She won't drink it. You've betrayed me. Very well, Miss Pipkin, do your worst, so will I. I see a photograph passing between my husband and a lady not ten

minutes in my house. It may be, of course it is, *her* likeness. Whatever I may be, whatever the Devonshire Boarding House is, my husband is a married man, Miss Pipkin! (*slaps her hands together*) And I'm told by a Bubblecome female, my own townswoman, "yes she does."

HODGE. And being a Bubblecome female, of course, you believes her. Nobody never deceives nobody as comes from Bubblecome. Don't make me say more, Mrs. 'Odge.

MISS P. If Mrs. Hodge has done anything that Bubblecome would be grieved to hear, don't say it, Mr. Hodge. I knew enough already.

MRS. H. I daresay, I daresay, Miss Pipkin. However, I don't care what falsehood that base man may have told you about me, he can't say nothing against my morals. I never gave nobody no likeness—there, Miss Pipkin, I grieve to say, I never gave a strange gentleman my likness in the very face of his wife.

MISS P. Mrs. Hodge, you insult me. Mr. Hodge, show her the photograph. Convince her how she has misjudged me, and then carry my boxes, there are only three of them, to Paddington, and let me go back to Devonshire. (*to* MRS. HODGE) I shan't forget what has passed between us. (*indignantly goes up to back*)

HODGE. (*aside to* MRS. HODGE) Will yer give in now?

MRS. H. No!

HODGE. (C., *aside*) Then I must bother her more. (*aloud*) Look here, Miss Pipking. (MISS PIPKIN *advances*, L.) It ain't you as is insulted, it's me, and I can stand it better than I can stand them, ere three boxes. I don't want to carry no wan load to Paddington, because Mrs. 'Odge tries to put off something she knows on, by kicking up a shine about nothing. Look here, Betsy, you objects to this photograph, very well, take it back, Miss Pipking, put it in yer buzzum. (*gives it*) I can do without it, the face is indelicately imprinted on my memory. (*Exit* C.)

MRS. H. And you dare to let him say that?

MISS P. Mrs. Hodge, it is not my face!

MRS. H. Who's is it then? Let me see it. If it is not yours, you need not be afraid. Let me see that it is not your face, and I shall be satisfied.

MISS P. My dear Mrs. Hodge, I assure you that you are exciting yourself about nothing.

MRS. H. Prove it, Miss Pipkin, prove it, that's all I ask.

MISS P. (*after hesitation*) Very well then, you shall be satisfied. It isn't delicate—it makes me blush. I'll never forgive you for it. There, (*covers face of photograph*) I can't show you the face, I must cover that, but now satisfy

yourself, Mrs. Hodge, you can see enough, you can see—the trousers !

(*shrieks, puts hand to face, runs off* L. *door*)

MRS. H. (*calling after her*) It's a gentleman ! I beg your pardon, Miss Pipkin. I sincerely beg your pardon. Now, she'll go to Bubblecome and ruin me. To think of Hodge turning upon me like that. But am I too quick ? S'pose 'tis Hodge's photograph which he's give to her, instead of her to he. *'Tis* Hodge's likeness, of course it is. To think of Miss Pipkin, as holds her head so high, carrying on with Hodge, and Hodge as I've kept so low, raising his eyes to her. But I'll be even with 'em. (*fetches writing materials from table at back*) I'll write to Bubblecome at once. We'll see what Mr. Slater, who has been hankering arter her so long, will say, when he hears of this.

Enter MR. SLATER, C., *with bag and umbrella.*

MRS. H. Upon my word, if it isn't Mr. Slater hisself.

SLATER. Not so loud. Be careful ! I'm here on the sly.

MRS. H. What ? Mr. Slater come to London on the sly ! What will Bubblecome think of you ? But men are all alike. I ought to know. Haven't I married two of 'em ?

SLATER. My dear, Mrs. Hodge, it is because I know that men are so bad, that I am about to throw myself upon the generosity of a woman. I come to you as distinct from Mr. Hodge, and I appeal to your kindness, your gentleness, your tenderness, to take pity on a lonely man.

MRS. H. Mr. Slater! My husband has given me provocation, but really. How dare you, Mr. Slater!

SLATER. I don't mean that. I want you, unknown to Mr. Hodge, to help me in a matter which requires a woman's tact and delicacy. I'm going to be married !

MRS. H. At last ? She's here now.

SLATER. My Flora ! my lovely Flora, where is she ?

MRS. H. If by Flora you mean Miss Pipkin, and you're going to be married to Miss Pipkin.

SLATER. Miss Pipkin here ? I'm lost.

MRS. H. You look surprised, Mr. Slater.

SLATER. I'm not only surprised, Mrs. Hodge, I'm confounded. Whatever brings Miss Pipkin here ? Destruction !

MRS. H. Doesn't all Bubblecome know you've had your eye on her these five years, ever since you first went there, Mr. Slater?

SLATER. All Bubblecome be hanged !

MRS. H. I'm hurt to hear you say that, Mr. Slater. But pause before you go too far with Miss Pipkin ; she's a wicked

woman. I know things about Miss Pipkin that would make all Bubblecome blush like one cheek. Even if what I say makes you give her up—even if it makes her run off with my husband in despair, I will tell you, I must tell you, there's something between her and Mr. Hodge.

SLATER. (*surprised*) Are you sure of this, Mrs. Hodge?

MRS. H. Almost sure.

SLATER. If you are not quite sure I must finish what I was going to say. Put aside Miss Pipkin, she is the last person I wish to hear about at this moment. There was a time; but she's played hot and cold with me for so long that —this is the very point on which I want your assistance. I'm going to be married, but not to Miss Pipkin.

MRS. H. I'm glad to hear it. (*they shake hands*) Anything I can do to save you from Miss Pipkin I will do for the credit of Bubblecome.

SLATER. She's kept me about for so long that I resolved at last to—to——

MRS. H. Give her up?

SLATER. Not precisely give her up, but to try somebody else. I advertised—there—I'm not ashamed of it. I advertised for a wife, and after some correspondence, exchange of portraits, and all that, I've come to a settlement with a most eligible young lady. I took the liberty to appoint to meet her here to-day at ten, and I want you to see that we meet without anyone else knowing anything about it.

MRS. H. But if you ain't ashamed, Mr. Slater, what's the use of secrecy?

SLATER. Bubblecome and Miss Pipkin. I have never seen my Flora except on paper, and if it should turn out wrong; if there should be a hitch when we meet, I should like to go back to Bubblecome and Miss Pipkin without a stain on my character. (*takes out photograph*) Look here! Should a face like this flutter about your door, you will know what to do. Doesn't she appear to be everything charming and suitable?

MRS. HODGE *takes and examines photo.*

MRS. H. Where have I seen that face before? I have it. She's very like what Miss Pipkin was at twenty. The more I look the more I see the resemblance.

SLATER. (*taking photo back*) There is a slight resemblance even now. But every feature is so much more lovely, those eyes so much brighter, that mouth so much more refined. (*kisses and puts photo in pocket*) A fig for Miss Pipkin beside them.

HODGE *enters* C. *and stands listening.*

Ah, my dear Mrs. Hodge, if Miss Pipkin had been half so beautiful I should never have had to come to you.

HODGE. (*advancing* C.) Oh! indeed!

MRS. H. (R.; *startled*) William, you ought to be downstairs!

SLATER, (L.) Who is this person?

HODGE. Only the beautiful creature's husband! (*to* MRS. H.) You're a good 'un to make a fuss about a paltry photograph ain't you?

SLATER. Sir!

HODGE. I was addressin' of Mrs. 'Odge. No wonder you like me downstairs.

MRS. H. He didn't mean me.

HODGE. In course he didn't! You're a nice 'un to kick up a dust about a paltry picter, you are.

SLATER. Mr. Hodge, don't you go too far.

HODGE. I was addressin' of Mrs. Odge, sir—you was a speaking, sir, was you? Let me advise *you* not to go too far. I've seen you before somewheres, (*thinking*) and I shall know you again. (*to* MRS. HODGE) You're a beauty to pull a respectable young woman to pieces, ain't you? Why that gal Pipking's worth a dozen of you.

MRS. H. I've done nothing I'm ashamed of. (*to* SLATER) It's all his wickedness.

SLATER. I know it, my dear Mrs. Hodge, I know it. Sir, be a man. Why do you look at your wife and bully me? Why don't you face me if you've got anything to say? Do you suppose, sir——

HODGE. Yes, I do, and I don't want any more of it, that's straight.

MRS. H. But doesn't he tell you he was talking of a photograph?

HODGE. And don't I tell him that's only a put off! Damn the photograph! (*turns up stage in anger*)

SLATER. (*following him*) In other words, sir, when you damn that photograph, you injure me in my warmest feelings, you damn me, sir.

MRS. H. (*following them up and down*) Was it your photograph after all?

HODGE. No, it wasn't.

SLATER. You know it wasn't. Good gracious, woman, you're as bad as he is. (*takes hat and umbrella to back*)

MRS. H. (R.) I only thought—I only saw the trousers. Then 'twas yours. (*to* HODGE) I know 'twas yours. Oh, you wretch!

SLATER. The trousers! My dear Mrs. Hodge——

MRS. H. The other, not the one you showed me—the one he gave her.

HODGE. The other, Mrs. 'Odge. Go on, Betsy, you'll tell me all about it by degrees.

MRS. H. You know what I mean—you know I mean Miss Pipkin's photograph, your photograph. You know it too well.

SLATER. Mrs. Hodge, you bewilder me.

MRS. H. Can't you see that there are two photographs?

HODGE. Oh! there *is* two photographs, is there? Now, sir, I can answer for the inn ercence of one of them, and as I ain't got no doubt from the words I overheard that the other s yours or hers, will you just take that 'ere coat off?

(*spars at him*)

MRS. H. William!

SLATER. The other is a lady's portrait, but it is not your wife's. I was speaking of that lady when you came in. The rest is my secret.

HODGE. Will you just take that 'ere coat off? I don't want to make a mess of it, as I s'pose I shall be expected to brush it afore you go.

MRS. H. Convince him! Show him a corner!

SLATER. No, let him explain that other matter. There is a mystery between him and Miss Pipkin, let him explain that. (*defiantly*)

HODGE. (*dumb foundered*) That is Miss Pipkin's secret Well, if you won't fight, you won't.

SLATER. Then we'll let the matter drop.

MRS. H. Tell me that they weren't your trousers, and I'll forgive you, William.

SLATER. On condition that he doesn't tell Miss Pipkin that I am here.

HODGE. Oh, you don't want Miss Pipkin to know. Then you must be Mr. Slater. I've got you, and I can punish you another way. Will you show me that 'ere portrait, or will you show it to Miss Pipkin?

SLATER. I've reasons for not wishing to see Miss Pipkin here, and I'm not at liberty to show you the photograph. If you can't trust Mrs. Hodge, why can't you trust me? I assure you that there's nothing wrong. Let me answer for your wife.

MRS. H. I can answer for Mr. Slater.

HODGE. And I'll answer for Miss Pipkin.

SLATER. I'll take your word for it.

MRS. H. But I won't.

HODGE. (*aside*) Can they both be come to town on the same game? At all events I must clear the coast for her, the time's up. (*aloud*) And I won't take your word, sir. My cr'acter, a lady's cr'acter has been suspected. I'll fetch the young woman, and clear myself, and then perhaps you'll take that 'ere coat off. (*Exit* C.)

SLATER. Mrs. Hodge, I can't meet Miss Pipkin, and 'tis ten o'clock

MRS. H. When she knows you're here, she won't dare to come after what has passed. I wish I had another room, but we must make the best of it. (*goes to* R. *window*) Get behind the curtain, and slip away if she does.

SLATER. But suppose she looks round.

MRS. H. Put up your umbrella. There (*gives umbrella*) get behind that. If the other one comes first, lock the door. 'Tis the only thing left to do. I'll go down and look out for the young lady. I ought to be there now. (*Exit*, C.)

SLATER. It's deuced hard when a fellow wants to have all his coolness ready for such an interview as this to be afraid of an interruption so terrible. It makes me feel as if I were ten years older instead of what I ought to look. Why didn't I send a photograph to date instead of going back to twenty? If she should fail me when she sees me, and if Pipkin should find it out, I shall be ruined. Whatever can she be doing in London? Some one coming! Is it Flora?

MISS P. (*without*, C.) Oh, Mr. Hodge, it makes me blush.

SLATER. No, 'tis the voice of Miss Pipkin!

Hides behind curtain, R. HODGE *opens door and looks round cautiously.*

HODGE. There, mum, I told you I had frightened him off.

MISS P. I feel so nervous. (*looks at watch*) 'Tis ten o'clock now; he ought to be here. Oh, Mr. Hodge, if your wife or Mr. Slater should discover us?

HODGE. I'll keep my eye on Mrs. Hodge, and I've got my eye on Mr. Slater. He'd better look out, he had. (SLATER *dodges behind curtain*) Now listen, mum, I'm going down to watch for the young gent. If he comes I'll send him up, and you can turn the key till you've done his business. In case you hear anybody else coming, to be safe, just put up your umbrella (*fetches it from back and opens it*), and hold it afore your face like this. They wouldn't dare to pull it down, you can easily bolt then, you know.

MISS P. Oh, Mr. Hodge, it makes me blush so. I do wish I'd never come.

HODGE. Cheer up, mum, cheer up! You've got his promise. (*aside*) More fool him! Treat him like a woman has a right to, when he can't get loose except with a court of law and damages. They talks of that 'ere chap Cupid and his arrers, but it ain't arrers as makes marriages now a days, it's writs. (*Exit* C.)

MISS P. I wish I'd never taken this dreadful step. I could have made Mr. Slater propose without half the anxiety and humiliation. Oh dear! oh dear! If he should ever hear of it. (*goes to mirror*) I'm sure he will be disappointed. I ought never to have made myself out so young. What's that? (*goes to window* L.) I declare that dreadful woman's on the step too. They're quarrelling. She won't—he insists—she goes back. She's coming. I know she's coming. (*puts up umbrella*) Oh dear! oh dear! I won't meet her again.

SLATER *has quietly put up umbrella, and is making for* C. *door.*

MISS P. I'll rush past her, and leave the house first. (*going* C. *meets* SLATER, *they dodge behind umbrellas*)

MISS P. Mr. Slater! I know the patch on that boot.

SLATER. Miss Pipkin! I recognise that antiquated umbrella. I've seen that darn before.

MISS P. I never expected to see you here!

SLATER. You expected to see another gentleman.

MISS P. You heard that! Yes, sir, a gentleman too proud, too generous to take advantage of a lady by overhearing her secrets.

SLATER. I did not mean to hear them.

MISS P. Were you not hiding, Mr. Slater, hiding from an injured man? Could anything be more mean, more shabby, Mr. Slater?

SLATER. I would have kept your secret, Miss Pipkin, had not you discovered me, when trying to escape an injured woman! Poor Mrs. Hodge!

MISS P. Mr. Slater, I throw back the imputation, and blush to say in reply, poor Mr. Hodge!

SLATER. Miss Pipkin, appearances may be against me, but I assure you, there is nothing that Mr. Hodge need regret between me and Mrs. Hodge.

MISS P. The cause of Mrs. Hodge's ridiculous and insulting suspicions was a secret, a harmless secret, between myself and her husband. Your conduct, and that curtain, have told you what it is; you have the advantage of *me*.

SLATER. Then I owe you an equivalent! My secret is that I expect to meet a lady! Forgive me, Miss Pipkin.

MISS P. After what has passed between you and me, you can tell me that without a sigh, Mr. Slater! Oh, Mr. Slater! But how can I blame you? What right have I to blame you? I who am almost wedded to another.

SLATER. Another! Miss Pipkin, and without a word to me. But why should I complain? Miss Pipkin, am I not almost married to another too?

MISS P. What was I to do, Mr. Slater? You never told me straightforwardly that you cared for me. Could I—was I to refuse an offer, which, I say it without offence, had a great advantage? He is a great deal younger than you.

SLATER. Miss Pipkin, your words are the mere echo of the facts in my own case; the other lady adds the fascination of *youth* to her other graces.

MISS P. I am not very old, sir. But still all is over between us then; we are both bettering ourselves,it appears --we can therefore continue friends.

SLATER. Shall we carry our reconciliation to the point of a sacrifice? I expect the lady here every moment.

MISS P. I would leave the room for your benefit, but the gentleman may be now on the stairs.

SLATER. Never mind, neither of us will go. (*aside*) They won't come together; I've arranged that. (*aloud*) Very well, the presence of a *mature* female friend at such a time would, in my particular situation, be very acceptable.

MISS P. I was going to ask the same favour from you; your *fatherly* support would greatly facilitate the first stage of *our* interview. I know *he'll* come first.

SLATER. (*aside*) We shall see. (*aloud*) You would know when to go if required. But—if in fact the young lady were to turn out—if she squinted or stuttered — What am I saying? If I were to give a cough like this (*coughs*), I should be glad if you wouldn't go at all!

MISS P. And if the young gentleman carried a crutch, or had a red nose, or—but how ridiculous I am, haven't I seen him too often not to know?

SLATER. You *have* seen him then?

MISS P. (*aside*) I've seen the photograph. (*aloud*) Of course —could I marry a gentleman I'd never seen? Would you marry a woman you'd never seen?

SLATER. (*aside*) I've seen her photograph any way. (*aloud*) Of course I wouldn't—only it occurred to me, that——

MISS P. Exactly, we both want to be on the safe side—appearances are deceptive. Therefore if you cough like this (*coughs*) I stay, and if I cough like this (*coughs*) I wish you to stop the interview. Turn upon the young man like an

elder brother, or something of that sort, and if necessary knock him down.

SLATER. Agreed! I'll be loud at least, if I ain't violent. What's that?

MISS P. There's some one coming.

SLATER *runs and sits* R. C. MISS PIPKINS *runs and sits* L.
HODGE *enters hurriedly from* C., *runs to* MISS PIPKIN.

HODGE. He ain't come, and I don't believe he's going to come. (*sees* SLATER) Mr. Slater! Very well—all the better, cos I shan't stand it no longer. (*to* MISS PIPKIN) You must put me right with my wife. She's arter me now

Enter MRS. HODGE *hurriedly* C.

MRS. H. Miss Pipkin here! I thought so. But since you are here, we'll have it out. (*to* SLATER) The young woman ain't a coming, Mr. Slater. It's a take in. I won't have no more to do with it. You must put me right with Mr. Hodge, he follows me like his shadow.

MISS P. (*rising*) I thought I had cleared away your ridiculous mistake. I showed you the—the—body of the photograph; you could see it wasn't mine. I don't wear—you make me blush, Mrs. Hodge.

MRS. H. How do I know they wasn't his? They're all very much alike.

HODGE. What's very much alike?

MRS. P.—She means the—the——

MRS. H. I mean the trousers—there!

SLATER. (*rising*) I assure you, my dear Mrs. Hodge, Miss Pipkin has told me all. You ought to know her better. Believe me when I say I know nothing about the trousers, but I can answer for the legs. (*puts umbrella down*)

HODGE. If she's told you all, in course you've told her all! What did you tell her about them features—them lovely eyes and mouth. Prove to me as when you spoke of lovely features, they wasn't my wife's features, and I'll forgive you.

MRS. P. Can't you see that for yourself, Mr. Hodge?

MRS. H. They wasn't yours, at all events.

SLATER. Mrs. Hodge was kind enough to promise to help me to an interview with a young lady, who was to meet me here without your knowledge, and the features in question were the young lady's features, that's all.

HODGE. You hear that, Miss Pipkin—you confirms that, Miss Pipkin.

MISS P. It makes me blush to say it—I have confessed to Mr. Slater that the photograph—or rather the portion of the

photograph of which Mrs. Hodge complains, related to a young gentleman whom Mr. Hodge was to bring to me without the knowledge of his wife.

MRS. H. You hear that, Mr. Slater? You believe that? Ain't she only copying your own story?

HODGE. Ain't your side copying ours? No, I can believe anything of Bubblecome. I knows the weakness of the female, I can believe the gent's as bad. I'm satisfied, Mr. Slater.

MRS. H. But I'm not satisfied. I won't be put off with the half of a photograph. I'm not to be took in with a paltry pair of trousers. Show me the face—show me the rest. If 'tis as you say, there can't be no reason why not.

MISS P. Not the slightest. There, Mr. Hodge, satisfy your wife. (*gives him photograph*)

SLATER. And lest there be one doubt remaining on your part, Mr. Hodge—there, Mrs. Hodge, satisfy your husband. (*gives photograph, the* HODGES *together examine photos*)

MRS. H. (*after pause of recollection*) Mr. Slater, Miss Pipkin, it needn't go no further than us four, ain't they your own photographs twenty years younger? Didn't you come to London on the sly to marry your own selves, and never knew it all the time?

MISS P. Your idea is ridiculous; can't you see the difference?

SLATER. Do you suppose I don't know the woman I'm going to marry?

MRS. H. Didn't you tell me you'd never met the lady? (*goes up to table at back to album*)

MISS P. Never met the lady? Oh, Mr. Slater!

HODGE. Well, as to that, mum, you've no cause to complain, you told me yourself you'd never met the gentleman. (*joins* MRS. HODGE *at back*)

SLATER. Miss Pipkin, for your own sake contradict that.

MISS P. It is true I had never met him, but I have seen him a hundred times. (*aside*) I'd seen the photograph.

MRS. H. (*examining album*) Look here, William!

SLATER. (*aside*) What can they want at that album? (*aloud*) Can you have deceived me, Miss Pipkin?

MISS P. Have I—have you?

The HODGES *advance* C. *with open album.*

MISS P. (*aside*) Dear me, 'tis the Bubblecome celebrities!

MRS. H. (*looking at album*) Miss Pipkin as she appeared at the Bubblecome Flower Show in the month of May, 1874.

HODGE. (*turning over album leaves*) Console yourself, Miss

Pipkin, here's Mr. Slater on his wisit to the Devonshire Boarding 'Ouse when Mayor of Warminster, five years afore he ever saw Bubblecome at all. You've took yourselves in, you're the only sufferers; get married at once and say no more about it.

SLATER. How could Miss Pipkin have any confidence in me after this?

MISS P. No, Mr. Hodge, we must go back to Bubblecome and repent.

HODGE. Look 'ere, take my advice, marry first and repent afterwards. That's what sensible people do. (*aside*) I owes them that for Devonshire. (*aloud*) Now I insist upon it. I ain't going to have two journeys to the station, when yer united luggage will go in one cab. If you don't, I'll tell all Bubblecome; upon my conscience I will.

MRS. HODGE *puts album on table*, R.

SLATER. I fear you must take me, unworthy as I am.

(*crosses to* MISS PIPKIN)

MISS P. (L.) I suppose you are right. (*goes up* L. *with* SLATER, *they change sides in coming down*, MISS PIPKIN, L.C.) You will keep our secret now, Mr. Hodge?

HODGES. (R.C.) Yes, if you won't ax me to carry your six boxes to the station, and if you'll tell Bubblecome when you get back, that Mrs. 'Odge is givin' up the boardin' 'ouse, and that you've seen Mr. 'Odge at last, and that he's goin' in for an easier life, where he can sit down.

MRS. H. I don't want to sit down. (*sits* R.)

HODGE. Then we'll set up one of them 'ere concertinas on rollers. I'll be the concertina, and you shall push behind. I'm ready to meet you, Mrs. 'Odge, but I must sit down. (*sits* R.C.) Here, take these! (*offers photos to* MISS PIPKIN)

MISS P. No, you can keep them. (*puts arms round* SLATER'S *neck*) I blush to say it, but we are going to be taken together.

CURTAIN.